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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ANTANANARIVO 000850

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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: TRYING TO AVOID THE WORST

REF: 09 ANTANANARIVO 846

Classified By: DCM ERIC STROMAYER FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

¶11. (C) Summary: Madagascar's halting mediation and transition process has derailed dramatically following publication of Tuesday's "Maputo III" resolutions and Rajoelina's immediate, extreme, and negative reaction to them (reftel). Probably using the resolutions and the unfortunate letters signed and sent by his opposition to Ban Ki-Moon and the Danish Prime Minister as a pretext for walking away from an increasingly unworkable cohabitation, Rajoelina declined local ambassadors' appeal on December 10 to turn the other cheek and resume discussions with his adversaries. They did, however, apparently talk Rajoelina out of taking another dangerous step back to unilateralism, at least for now. Rajoelina proposed privately to ambassadors scrapping the entire Maputo process and instead moving quickly to legislative elections within three months, which all ambassadors rejected as unwise, unilateral, non-consensual and certain to provoke swift condemnation, sanctions, and enhanced isolation from all quarters. Chissano had asked the local ICG to "prevail" on Rajoelina to move forward with discussions based on Maputo III, but not necessarily accepting its resolutions. Chissano also advised that Rajoelina had rejected his offer to engage in shuttle diplomacy to try and break the impasse. On the other hand, the prospect of the AU organizing a December 17 higher-level ICG meeting here in Antananarivo, with Chissano and other mediators present, has given a glimmer of new hope that a further deterioration might be avoided, at least until then. The local ICG released a statement on December 11 calling for restraint and the avoidance of all unilateral actions. Meanwhile, the ongoing stranding of Madagascar's opposition political leaders in Maputo -- from which Malagasy airspace remains closed by Rajoelina's order -- is another unfavorable factor. While 'Tana remains outwardly calm, rumors are swirling regarding the possible naming of a military Prime Minister, the naming, by the military itself, of a new military directorate or partial military government, etc. A possible move to Mauritania-style early elections may be a new solution, but only if consensus among the Malagasy can be achieved first. Local ambassadors now are trying to "avoid the worst", rather than any more ambitious solutions to Madagascar's worsening political impasse. AGOA eligibility is understood here to be (all but) dead, as the various protagonists stubbornly continue to put their individual

interests ahead of the people's. End Summary

¶2. (C) In his December 9 evening address to the nation, Rajoelina reiterated intransigent points he had made previously to the press, categorically rejecting the Maputo III resolutions and condemning the delegations who had reached them as "traitorous". He refused to directly address the issue of alleged pending arrest warrants for the participants (denied to diplomats by all government contacts) or the airspace closure to traffic from Mozambique (confirmed by civil aviation authorities). Late on December 9, the Foreign Minister invited Ambassador Marquardt to organize local ICG ambassadors to meet Rajoelina at 1600 on December 10. Local ICG ambassadors (US, French, Russian, Chinese, EU Presidency/German, Libyan, UNDP, and South African) met beforehand to coordinate before seeing Rajoelina. There was a consensus that the only way forward was via a cooling of tempers, and a resumption of dialogue to move forward to a transition government, including the safe return ASAP of the movement leaders stranded in Maputo and the return of Chissano and/or other mediator(s). The group released a statement on December 11 calling for restraint and the avoidance of all unilateral actions.

¶3. (C) The French Ambassador categorically stated that Rajoelina will not declare unilaterally a military PM-led government, but then said "the ICG must strongly dissuade him from considering it." He also tabled the notion of Rajoelina establishing a technocratic government while announcing that he would not run for President himself, which the group rejected as too little, too late. Similarly, his suggestion

ANTANANARI 00000850 002 OF 004

that the ICG formally reject Maputo III as out of line with previous agreements gained no traction. Regarding the possibility of mass popular street action in response to current events, the prevailing view was that no political faction has a mass following prepared to do so, and most Malagasy are tired of this situation and simply want to move forward with their lives -- and the approaching holidays. The ICG agreed that if Rajoelina decided to create a unilateral government, no country would be able to support it, and it would probably be only be a matter of time before the military took action, the possible consequences of which remain unclear. Both the American and French Ambassadors stressed to the group that they had strongly urged the military leadership in recent meetings not to take any action that would make matters worse, and felt their message had been well understood.

¶4. (C) The South African Ambassador advised that he had received materials on the course of the meetings in Maputo from his government and had just completed a phone call with President Chissano in London. Chissano said he had had numerous phone conversations with Rajoelina over the last week and had urged conciliation. Rajoelina had been included via this means, not excluded as he claimed. In an effort to break the impasse he had offered to engage in shuttle diplomacy but Rajoelina had rejected his offer. Chissano had called on the South African Ambassador to get the local ICG to "prevail on Rajoelina" to compromise and walk back from the extreme position he had taken. Chissano also wants the ICG to pressure Zafy (when he returns) to give up designs on the mining ministry, and said Zuma, Guebeza, and Kabila, as SADC troika, will pressure Ravalomanana to drop his claim on the decentralization ministry.

¶5. (C) The ICG ambassadors then met Rajoelina for over one hour on December 10. He was accompanied by FM Andriamanjato, Advisor Norbert Lala Rasirihonona, and S-G Resampa. Rajoelina made no preliminary remarks, allowing the ambassadors successively to make strong points on the need to turn the other cheek, bring his interlocutors back, eschew unilateralism, resume the Maputo process, take the Maputo III resolutions as nothing more than discussion material rather than as decisions, and find a way out of this continuing

crisis. The US ambassador advised him that time was almost up for AGOA eligibility, just the first of a number of deadlines that Madagascar will miss if they do not come quickly to reason.

¶6. (C) Rajoelina responded after the tour de table that he was finding the co-presidency/cohabitation "delicate and difficult," and was considering scrapping it in favor of moving quickly to legislative elections within three months. For organizing those elections, he said he would want international support, and stressed that the creation of the independent electoral commission (CENI) which would run them would be inclusive and consensual. He explained that the elected deputies would then select a prime minister and a government (without explaining how Madagascar would have moved magically from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government).

¶7. (C) The ambassadors then took turns reacting negatively to his unexpected proposal, explaining that it would be seen as unilateral and a massive step backwards after months of collaborative efforts by the international community to move toward a consensual resolution of the crisis. The US ambassador categorically rejected any American support for elections organized unilaterally, and said he doubted the UN or anyone else would react differently. He advised that the cohabitation, while manifestly imperfect and unwieldy, had hardly been given a chance to succeed, given that it had never even met (except twice in the presence of ambassadors, at their request). The French ambassador called Maputo III "a paper rag" that he could take inspiration from if he wished, but whose "decisions" were not decisions at all and were not binding on him or anyone else. Others implored Rajoelina to turn the other cheek in response to the UN and Danish letters and Maputo III, and to resume discussions in

ANTANANARI 00000850 003 OF 004

good faith. Norbert Lala responded at length that Maputo II did indeed represent unacceptable decisions taken, and that it - along with the UN and Danish letters -- was a major affront to the Maputo process by having diluted the powers of the presidency to an unacceptable degree. Rajoelina then circulated a prepared, signed letter to ambassadors that deplored the behavior of the other leaders, denounced the letters they had signed, and rejected Maputo III in its entirety. He did, however, agree to consider the ambassadors' views before taking any next steps. The U.S. ambassador asked the last questions of Rajoelina: when will he allow the opposition and his own prime minister to return from Maputo, and would he confirm the nonexistence of arrest warrants against them? Rajoelina offered only a curious, broad smile in reply. Norbert Lala said "they can return when they so desire."

¶8. (C) Foreign Minister Andriamanjato, who had not spoken at the meeting with Rajoelina, came alone to the CMR afterwards. As usual, he portrayed himself as the moderate in Rajoelina's camp, claiming that he alone had argued against the closure of Malagasy airspace to traffic from Mozambique and was still pressing for the return of those stranded there (which he expects to occur quickly). He also explained that he thinks that the cohabitation could lead to civil war by having four uncooperative leaders all trying to pull strings within the military beneath them, and that is why they are now inclined to scrap it. Unity within the military is essential to avoiding civil war, he said, and he is not certain himself that they are united behind Rajoelina. (Note: we are fairly certain that they are not united behind anyone or anything.) Andriamanjato then admitted, surprisingly, that the Maputo III resolutions had simply provided a pretext for derailing a process that they no longer support anyway. He said that the meeting nonetheless had been effective in stopping Rajoelina from advancing his proposal to move unilaterally to early legislative elections: afterwards Rajoelina dropped a planned televised address announcing his new approach. The difference, said

Andriamanjato, had been the strong solidarity among the ambassadors, including what he called the "unexpected firmness of the French" against early, unilateral elections. The ambassador stressed that the key factor in moving ahead is consensuality. If the Malagasy agree among themselves that the wobbly cohabitation is not workable, then they need to decide consensually on a different approach. Time, however, is wasting, and the AGOA decision is now almost sure to be negative given the course of recent -- and apparent future -- events; Andriamanjato just nodded. He also said that the AU's proposal for a December 17 ICG in 'Tana is under consideration by the president. The ambassador recommended that they agree to the meeting, invite Chissano back as soon as possible to prepare it, start communicating constructively among themselves about possible ways forward, and not do anything stupid to derail the process further.

19. (C) Comment: The French Ambassador told Ambassador Marquardt on December 11 that the French may be looking now toward a Mauritania-style move to quick -- but necessarily consensual -- elections in order to put this cohabitation nightmare to rest. At today's meeting of the full diplomatic corps, there was considerable resonance expressed for a quicker -- but still consensual -- escape from the current impasse via elections than the Maputo process would provide. It was acknowledged that there would be a conscious trade-off between quality of elections and speed, but many appeared willing to entertain it. While the prospect of the December 17 ICG might keep matters calm until then (assuming Rajoelina accepts the initiative), there appears to be a growing gap between the evident drift to a completely new approach (favored by many Malagasy, not just Rajoelina) and Chissano's expressed intention to come back merely to put the finishing touches on the Maputo process (i.e. implement the co-presidency, finish the allocation of ministerial portfolios, etc.). Overall, there has been a palpable shift in diplomats' thinking here, away from more ambitious solutions and toward simply "avoiding the worst." It seems that, if the Malagasy can avoid a meltdown over the coming

ANTANANARI 00000850 004 OF 004

week, the holidays will then take over and allow more time for solutions to emerge by early January. End comment.  
MARQUARDT